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ABSTRACT

Stories have always been the means of making a message, of exploring the relationship between past and present, and of giving significance to events. A noted native artist and writer described the "talking stick" of his tribe as a talisman which gives the person who possesses it the right to speak and hold the attention of the tribe. A teacher's version of the "talking stick," this paper provides examples of "student stories" and "teacher stories" which reveal how, through narrative, writers try to make sense of the past, the present, and possibly the future. In diverse examples of teacher modeling, illustrations of the importance of narrative is reiterated. Stories, even though voted in actuality as are the anecdotes told here, can take on a mythic quality in spite of their basis in fact, and the real-life experiences they capture are valuable as they allow students and teachers to make connections with other stories that may strike a chord in their own experience. (NH)

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The Talking Stick

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

Abstract

A collection of stories, this paper reveals the narratives I tell in my classes. The anecdotes from Distant Past, Recent Past, and Present reflect my values and idiosyncracies. They point out the significance of storying as a teaching and learning tool. Real-life experiences are valuable in making connections to other concepts.

THE TALKING STICK

Years ago, when I was teaching English in a junior secondary school, I attended an English teachers' conference in Vancouver at which George Clutesi, noted Native artist and writer, spoke on the meaning of the talking stick in his tribe. To paraphrase, the talking stick is a literal, physical talisman which gives the person who possesses it the right to speak and hold the attention of the tribe. I am taking up the talking stick here to speak with you, my colleagues, and to share some stories--as the keeper of the talking stick did. Stories were the means of making a message, of exploring the relationship between past and present, of giving significance to events, and I believe still are. Through narrative we try to make sense of the past, the present, and possibly the future. What follows is a string of tales, moving from the past to the present. Some of these are 'student stories' and some are 'teacher stories'. Hopefully some will resonate with you as they do with me. Once upon a time ...

Part I--The Distant Past.

I was teaching a rather dry unit on essays (reading them, not writing them) to a grade 10 class and was despairing about the motivational aspect; I mean who cared about these events from the distant past (see World War II)? After class, Ann--a quiet student who never contributed to class discussions--shyly approached me. The essay we had read had been about a prison camp in WWII, in fact the one on which the movie "The Great Escape" was based. Ann said to me, "Mrs. Allen, my Dad was in that prison camp. He has some things from there. Should I bring them to class?" Ann and her father had never discussed his imprisonment. She interviewed him in order to share his experiences with the class. The following day, Ann brought 'relics' from her father's incarceration in the POW camp: a button, a medal, an identity paper, whatever. She stood in front of the class, described each of the items, which were then passed around, and fielded questions about her Dad's imprisonment. Suddenly the essay came alive--this was a story that actually happened to real people! Ann made us all understand that the print on the page represented events in the lives of individuals. The story became significant because it was related to one of us. As stories are. And Ann became the expert, the centre of attention, the one who could explain to us the details of a <u>real</u> story. Her status was changed as was her

self esteem. The other positive outcome was that the class was willing to give essays another chance.

Some stories are imbedded in other stories and so it's hard to know where to start. Take the case of English 9E, within which are many stories. When it was time in June to make up class lists for the following year, I opted to take a special class of students who were perceived as 'behavior problems.' These were not slow students, but rather those who were seen as uncooperative, rowdy, unpleasant, unproductive. Many I knew from personal experience, having taught them English 8. The rest I knew by their negative reputations. I selected, from the list of grade 9 students, those who would constitute the 'special class.' At our first meeting in September, it was obvious to them that they were in a 'chosen' group. After that surprise they had another. I explained that I was going to interview them all in pairs in order to find out what their expectations for the course were: what did they want to learn? The term 'negotiation' didn't exist then, but the process did. Over the next week I listened to them as they articulated their interests, likes and dislikes, needs and preferences. To do this I moved three desks into the hall outside the room; beyond the open door, I and two students talked for about ten minutes while the class did a reading or writing assignment. Remember that these are students designated as behavior problems. Not once did I have to return to the classroom while I was interviewing pairs in the hallway. When the students came to believe that I meant what I said, they developed realistic, interesting goals for themselves in the course. After I summarized their aspirations and melded them with the course objectives, I was able to design a course which we could all live with and feel we had a stake in. They did great!

And I learned so much from them. Part way through the year, in this same class, Martin revealed that he enjoyed <u>The Old Man and the Sea</u>. He told me, "This is the first book I've ever read from beginning to end." I said, "But Martin, you were in my English class last year. We read eight novels." He replied, "I never finished any of them." "But Martin, how could you get a C+ if you didn't read the books?" "I'm a good listener," he answered. Insight: not all students learn primarily from print; not all students feel compelled to finish a book which isn't working for them. I still have trouble giving up a book but at least I realize that it's my right--and students' right--to do so.

Within the context of this 'special' class, mainly male, a new female student arrived mid term. The class was WASP as was the school (one Asian family--no Blacks, no Natives). The new girl was a Native Canadian from Southern Alberta, a Roman Catholic who was being sponsored by a local Mormon family. The first week she attended, she never spoke. I knew little of the oral traditions of Native peoples, but I did know about the cliques of adolescents. She was an outsider, not one to be communicated with.

Although Maureen was the impetus for what followed, I had previously been concerned about 'sharing and caring' in the class in terms of cooperation versus competition. In Maureen's second week, I disturbed the status quo of desks-in-straight-rows by saying, "Today I want to do something different. Let's make a big circle of the desks so we can see one another." This was disquieting to many made comfortable by routine. However, we made a circle and stared at one another. "I want you to turn to the person beside you (we numbered off 'one--two, one--two') and interview each other. Then introduce each other to the class with one interesting fact about the other person." We went around the circle introducing each other even though many knew one another well. When Maureen was introduced, her introduction went something like, "This is Maureen. She comes from Alberta. Her tribe makes lots of money raising buffalo." The dam was broken. Questions came to Maureen from all directions: what was her tribe, how many buffalo were there, what did they do with the buffalo, and so on. She was the knowledgeable individual who had unique experience to share. Like Ann, she became confident in her special status. Never again was she the outsider, the shunned.

Joy was alienated in another way. She was smart, very smart, and she didn't care who knew it. It wasn't that she disliked her classmates but rather that their concerns seemed irrelevant to her. She was the best creative writer of any student I taught--her imaginings I looked forward to reading and sharing with the class. Joy wasn't comfortable with the praise she received from the class, but was prepared to have me read her work aloud. Much of it was sad, because her life was sad. Joy was described by her psychiatrist as 'potentially suicidal.' She had, in her fifteen years of life, tried three times to end it. Yet in her writing she took such risks, made such efforts at creating other realities. Joy's writing opened her

to communication with others due to her expertise. In addition, she participated in group counselling which allowed her to share her anguish and help others. Friendships were formed from this peer involvement, bonds strong enough to see Joy through the senior highschool years.

The group counselling came about more by accident than design. I was counsellor to several girls who seemed to take up an inordinate amount of my time. They needed encouragement and reassurance that they were okay. Although I didn't mind giving them attention, I felt they needed other people as resources or backup in case I wasn't available. I identified eight girls who fit this category and who I felt would get along with one another. We met for an hour every week after school, like a club. My role was to facilitate if the need arose. Otherwise, I was a figure in the background; their circle of desks was the centre. I kept brief journal entries of what had been discussed at each meeting (the agenda was theirs). They became very important to one another and kept in touch over the years despite distance and direction of careers. I've always wanted to write about that special group of girls but felt it would be an invasion of their privacy. The issue of confidentiality seemed overriding to me.

Speaking of invasions and confidentiality, there was Steve, the thorn which bothered me more than any other because he was 'in my face.' I wrote about Steve twice, once intentionally in a journal article and once not, calling him Jimmy in an infamous case study about him. The context for the case study was a guidance class of grade 9 girls who were doing small group work to discuss issues and solve problems. I had written a hypothetical case study the night before which I distributed to the class. When we had finished reading it and I assigned tasks to various groups (eg. make suggestions to the teacher on ways to improve the situation--Jimmy was badly behaved, disruptive, uncooperative, obnoxious) a girl said, "This is Steve in our English class." I replied, "No, no, this is a made-up story about a boy who isn't real." "That's okay," she said. "You don't have to tell us. We know it's Steve." And to my horror, I realized she was right. Subconsciously, in my on-going frustration about Steve, I had described him in the case study. I felt I had compromised myself professionally and even worse had revealed details about him to his peers. But it's important to know the other facets of this situation.

At that time I was taking a course in behaviour modification at the university. Initially I disagreed with the theoretical orientation of behaviour mod. because it seemed to be a strategy of manipulating others who were ignorant of what was happening. We had to do some kind of research for the course, so I decided to try an experiment with my top grade 9 class (a compensation for the 'special' class). I taught them the essentials of classic conditioning, familiarizing them with positive and negative reinforcement. I explained that I was doing research in which they were the subjects. As usual, they were cooperative and keen. I told them that my purpose was to change their behaviour through reinforcement in the form of a three star system as in hockey games: at the end of each class I would select the three stars from that class and post their star status on a sheet near the door to the classroom. The criteria for star selection varied from student to student (remember that I knew them well having taught most for a year and a half). If a student was shy, any contributions she made could result in a star; if a student tended to dominate the air time, giving someone else a chance to talk would be reinforced. The simplicity and subjectivity of this process led me to believe it would be ineffective. In fact, I was astounded at how it encouraged students at both ends of the continuum of participation to change. Students would remind me that the class was almost over and I hadn't yet selected the three stars. They wanted this reward and were proud if they received it. I must explain that it was difficult for me to single out improvements because this class was a pleasure to teach. With one exception: Steve.

Thus it is within the context of the behaviour mod. experiment that the girls were reading the case study about Steve/Jimmy. When they reported back to the class on their suggestions for improving his behaviour, they made many reasonable recommendations (eg. the teacher should ignore Jimmy's inappropriate remarks but should reward him for real contributions; the teacher should make him responsible for something in the classroom such as the class library; the teacher should encourage him to gain expertise on a topic to share with the class). I was impressed with the insights they had and the commitment they seemed to feel for the task. But what astounded me over the next few weeks was the way they put into practice what they had suggested. Students--girls *and boys*--took responsibility for ensuring that when Steve came to class he was prepared with homework and materials. They pointed out contributions he made if I missed them. Two signed him up for the cross country team and joined with him. Slowly

Steve, who had craved attention, became aware that he was not alone, that his fellow students cared about him and were making efforts for him. His behaviour changed radically, and he became one of the best contributors to the class. In addition, he was a happy person who had friends. As an aside, two other English classes who heard about the star system through the grapevine decided they wanted to participate in the experiment too. It nearly drove me round the bend, but certainly convinced me that behaviour mod. can work.

Not all stories are about 'winning.' They are about learning, I believe. What I learned about students was often complemented by what I learned about myself as a teacher. I've never been a very tolerant person, as the following events illustrate. A grade 10 class had completed reading Hersey's Hiroshima and had researched the issues surrounding the dropping of the bomb in order to debate them. We had discussed the characteristics of a formal debate and were clear on our roles. Two teams had volunteered to argue the motion that the dropping of the bomb was ethically wrong. A student volunteered to chair, and the rest of the class would vote on which team presented the more effective case. I was an observer who would remain outside the debate. The presentations were made fairly rationally, although it was obvious that emotions were involved. However, in the concluding minutes charges and counter charges were made, unchallenged by the chair. The teams began to yell at each other and before I could intervene one boy shouted, "Who cares? They were only little yellow Japs anyway." At which an immediate silence fell. The class turned to me as I rose from my seat. "What did you say?" I asked. Red-faced with passion, he repeated what he had said. I lost it. "Get out of my classroom! Now!" This to the entire class, not just the offender. I felt that I was out of control and needed solitude to get myself together. The problem for the class was that they were not allowed in the halls without a pass, and I was not in any condition to be asked for one. They huddled outside close to the door until I invited them back with an apology and a rule: no racist remarks in my classroom. The boy who had said it I spoke to individually later but did not punish; he was, after all, repeating what he had heard at home.

I think I've made a shift from student stories to teacher stories so maybe a few others with a teaching focus are appropriate here. I've always considered myself privileged to have taught with my staff. They were a terrific group of well

trained, committed professionals who cared about the students and believed in the importance of what they were doing. They were also young, keen, and flexible. When I said I needed the vice principal (height 5 feet, 8 inches) and a fellow English teacher (height 6 feet, 5 inches) to demonstrate point of view for me they were only too willing to stage a fight at the front of my classroom. I was deliberately absent when the taller man lifted the shorter and slammed him against the wall. And then they left. When I arrived, a stunned class tried to explain what had happened. They had seen the event, but in different ways: who was angry, why this had happened, what the results would be. On to consider point of view in a short story.

Then there was the time I had invited a colleague to a poetry class because we had different views of the meaning of a poem. This had been discussed in the staffroom so when the class started not only was she there but also the vice principal and the tall English teacher. It was like a tennis match as we positioned ourselves around the room and vigorously explained and defended our views. The students shifted from one to the other of us as we questioned and illustrated, clearly involved in the interpretations. No consensus was reached, but important modelling had occurred.

Another attempt to model integration proved less successful. A colleague and I team-taught Hyerdahl's Kon Tiki and involved the art and industrial arts teachers in projects designed to encourage motivation. The art project consisted of making maps of flour, salt and water to track the course of the raft across the Pacific. We hoped through this to encourage the reading of the book. Unfortunately something went wrong with the proportions and we returned from a weekend to find the maps running off their bases onto the floor. The industrial arts project gave boys an opportunity to build a raft so they would have an understanding of what the crew went through. Naturally they used different materials, but presumably got some feel for the construction process. When we finally finished the book (I suspect nobody but the teachers read it) we transported the raft to the nearby lake and launched it. It promptly sank, to the cheers of its makers--if only, they were probably thinking, the Kon Tiki had suffered the same fate.

Part II--The Recent Past

At the university level, I once taught a young man, in my course on secondary reading, who had a B.A. in English. In October I taught a class on standardized reading tests, introducing my students to a commonly used college level reading test by having them write the test. They marked their own answer keys and developed a reading profile for themselves based on vocabulary, comprehension, and rate scores. We then talked about uses and limitations of standardized tests as well as their responses to having written one. I noticed that during the next two classes Mike was absent. I assumed he was sick, and would come to see me when he was better. Then I saw him on campus one day and asked him if he'd been ill. "No," he told me. "I've just realized that I'll never make it as a teacher." "Why Mike? You seem well suited to me." "I scored at the 14th percentile on that test you gave us. Being such a poor reader must mean I'll never be able to handle teaching English." "But Mike, you have your degree in English. How did you manage with courses in which you had several novels to read?" "Well, I'm really slow. But I listen in class and take good notes. And once I read a book I have pretty well total recall of plot, characters, even descriptions." "Let's take a look at your reading test Mike." We did. Mike's rate predictably was low; every item he had answered was correct. We talked through what the test was and was not measuring. I was appalled that this capable young man, on the basis of one test score, had been willing to change the course of his life. I don't use standardized tests anymore.

Brad, another student with a B.A. in English, was in my methods course. I encouraged the students not to take the traditional approach to teaching English but to try different strategies, especially techniques to involve their students. As background to this story, I had used small groups extensively in the class based on my own experience with highschool students. When I had originally used groups, I had no theoretical rationale for doing so. To learn about the whys for group work, I attended an English teachers' conference at which there was a session on using small groups in English classes. The presenter explained that we would be getting into small groups to do a problem-solving task. About half of the forty people in the audience stood up and left. On her way out, one woman said, "I came to learn about groups, not to do them." This was my first insight into what groups can mean for students. The second came when I was assigned

to a group in which one of my own highschool teachers was present. He was a take-charge kind of person who, when the task had been explained (rank order five goals for the teaching of English), immediately took on the role of leader. He put as the number one objective the teaching of literary criticism. He proceeded to number the others as he saw fit with no contributions from the four of us, his colleagues (I had reverted to the status of a grade 10 student). Finally I said, "Excuse me Mr. C., but I don't consider your number 1 as my first priority." A man beside me spoke up, "I'm not sure about the second one either. We need to discuss it." Breakthrough--we all began to talk and listen to one another. Groups can be threatening and people can be intimidating.

Back to Brad, my risk-taking student, who wanted to try group work despite warnings from his sponsor teacher. He asked if I would observe the class in which he introduced the concepts basic to effective group work: setting a task with realistic time parameters, limiting the number of students per group, assigning roles to people, ensuring students are comfortable with their peers, explaining the criteria for assessment if that is relevant. Brad had chosen the murder game, an involving activity in which each student receives a clue, as the initial ice breaker. They ask each other questions to which they can respond only with yes or no. The task is to figure out who was murdered and who was the killer. During the class, I sat at the back of the English 11 classroom while Brad explained the game and distributed clues. Then to my horror he said, "This half of the room is one group and this side the other." Luckily the sponsor teacher was not in the room to witness the debacle which followed. Immediately realizing he had made a mistake, Brad retreated to the safety of his desk. On one side of the class a girl stood up on her chair and yelled over the melee, "Shut up everybody! Here's what we're going to do. Get in a circle and ..." Within minutes that 'group' was organized and on task. The other group continued to mill around and never got organized or completed the task. Afterward I asked Brad what happened. "I blew it," he admitted. "I hadn't thought through the consequences of large groups." "What do you plan to do tomorrow?" I asked. "Go back and do it right," he replied. And he did. With his sponsor teacher there to be impressed. Groups don't just work; they need to be nurtured and practiced in. Cooperation is not a quality traditionally valued in our society. Yet this skill is critical for our students in becoming life-long learners.

Brian, an intern, had been having a difficult time controlling his grade 7 language arts class. In order to give him time to develop contracts for them, I said I'd take a couple of classes. During the first class we played a modified form of Categories, a game in which you try to guess the identity of the person who is it by using only indirect questions (eg. If you could be any character in any novel, who would you be? If you could marry anyone in history, whom would you choose?). In this case I was using the strategy to quiet them down (written rather than oral responses) as well as to try to learn about them as individuals, in lieu of an interest inventory. You can learn a great deal about students and their self concepts through such oblique approaches. For instance, a lot of the boys in response to "If you were a car, what kind of car would you be?" answered "A Lamborghini". I had told them I would summarize the results for the next class as they were curious about other people's answers. When I discussed the results with them I explained that I seriously doubted that this answer was accurate but more wish fulfillment. They laughed in acknowledgment. One girl had written "I'd be a beat up old V W"--I wanted to follow up on that one. Working with internship students in a supervisory role gave me unexpected opportunities for interacting with them and their students. And serendipity often had payoffs for all of us--such as this glimpse into a girl who needed help with her self-esteem.

Sandra, another intern, adapted something I did as the result of a mix up. She had been ill on Friday so her sponsor teacher took it upon herself to distribute to the class the next novel to be read, Steinbeck's The Pearl. Sandra had planned a class to introduce the book with slides of Mexico to give the students a sense of setting and arouse interest in the people. She was devastated on Monday to discover that half the class had completed the book over the weekend while half hadn't started it. She did her preteaching as planned, but when I came in on Tuesday asked, "What am I going to do now?" I offered to take the half who had read the book to the library for a work session. She accepted and continued with her original plan for reading and discussing the book.

In the library, I explained to the students that they had an important job to do to help their peers get the most out of the book. In pairs or threes, they would make up questions which the rest of the class would answer. I modelled the kinds of questions I wanted them to write, getting them to focus on character development, plot line, and setting. I encouraged them to be creative in their

questions and to have no more than five per chapter. Once chapters were assigned to groups, they worked through their chapter carefully and conscientiously. They talked about what should be highlighted and what could be omitted. They wrote their questions out in rough and then in good copy for their classmates. They also made up answer keys for Sandra. By the end of the class, all had completed the task. With great satisfaction they gave Sandra the results for her to copy for the others. She told me that students were really involved in answering these questions developed by their peers, more so than when she had given questions in the past. When they eventually worked through the answers together, the writers of the questions were the resources with whom to check alternative answers. Sandra continued the practice of students taking responsibility for generating questions and answers as she felt it promoted commitment and participation.

As I write I notice how often the theme of student-as-expert keeps surfacing. This was also true in an experiment I tried with an intern in her English 10 class. We were making a videotape in which she and I team-taught the class using a variety of techniques (I planned to use the video. with teachers inservice and was attempting to model some techniques to share). The class was not normally a very cooperative one, with a wide range of abilities and levels of maturity. However, in the face of a cameraman, camera on tripod, and banks of lights, they were well behaved and on task. For this part of the video. I wanted to show how students could take notes from listening to teachers talk. I put ten key words on the board (eg. denotation and connotation, appearance versus reality) and instructed that each of these words would be said by either Ms. R. or me in the course of our discussion. When they heard the word they should write it in their notebooks and try to give it a meaning. Sylvia and I sat at the front of the room facing each other and ignoring the class (literally--neither of us noticed a student who arrived late until we saw her on the tape!). We talked about a short story we all had read, and in the dialogue used the key words from the board in contexts which we hoped would make meaning clear to students. We had not rehearsed what we would say, so we responded to one another's comments extemporaneously. We were really interested in how we had reacted to the story, the differences in our visualizations, what point of view we thought the narrator had and so on. Both of us forgot about the camera in our involvement with the discussion. Afterward we collected the students' notes and debriefed what had

occurred. Their notes were excellent as was their behaviour as revealed by the video. But the biggest plus occurred at the end of the class when two of the brightest and *least* cooperative students asked Ms. R. if they could be responsible for a dialogue for the next story they read. They prepared the key words, talked to one another at the front, and fielded questions from the class. This approach continued to be popular and, in Sylvia's view, increased the learning and produced more appropriate behaviour.

To another class of grade 10's I had introduced the notion of study skills by examining ways of dealing with textbooks. The idea was to crack the code of the text in order to make it accessible to students. In order to do this, I gave the students samples of 'fun' ways (eg. crosswords, mystery clues) of investigating the use of Table of Contents, Index, Glossary and such. Their task, in groups of four, was to take a text they were unfamiliar with and develop either a crossword puzzle or questions which another group in the class could answer based on the new text. I had explained the task, asked if there were any questions, and let them go to it. One group was videotaped to show how they proceeded. Brenda and three boys were shown in decision-making which involved them in authority resolution: Brenda re-explained the task, assigned each of the three boys a subsection of it, gave them paper and directions to 'get with it.' Her no-nonsense approach continued throughout the exercise as she did her part as well as monitoring and assisting the others. What a great illustration of the assuming of leadership! She loved seeing herself on the video. and was proud of what the group accomplished under her direction. Over the next two years, each time I saw Brenda in the halls of the school she said, "You're the one who made that tape of me, right?" And I told her how much I appreciated her contribution to it.

In a grade 11 class, I was teaching a writing unit to improve communication skills. I anticipated that this non-academic group would want to learn how to apply for jobs, fill out technical forms, and so on. Instead they told me in no uncertain terms that they wanted to write stories. We began each class with seven minutes of journal writing in which they could write whatever they wanted. I noted that the journals were their personal property which I read only if they wanted me to . One girl consistently handed her journal to me to read. Her entries were usually related to relationships in her life: her mother and stepfather, her boyfriend or girlfriends. She often asked why things happened as

they did. Clearly she wanted a response from me so I wrote a few sentences back to her. Few of the boys handed journals in, but they all wrote in them. The following year I learned that one of the boys had been killed in an accident. I still had some of his journal entries and I reread them with mixed emotions. Matthew would be missed.

This grade 11 class continued to surprise me in their response to a small group activity I had planned for six students who seemed deficient in writing skills. In order to provide some support and success in their writing, I moved them to the front of the classroom where we arranged a circle of desks. The rest of the class worked on an assignment individually (writing the ending of a short story I had read to them, omitting the ending) while we seven did so as a group. Each student in the circle contributed one sentence which was then vetted with the group in order to come up with an ending all could agree on. Initially I had been reluctant to single out these students to form a group because I thought they would perceive this as a stigma: I am in this group due to poor writing skills. Instead the students considered they were being given special treatment--they could work together and pool their resources while the rest of the class had to work on their own. This perception was shared by the class; several students approached me later to inquire how they could get such special treatment! I realized that I needed to build in to subsequent lessons opportunities for me to work with all the students in a small group situation; they all need special attention, not just the ones with skill deficiencies.

My latest experience with students, thanks again to an intern who team-taught a writing unit with me, was with a grade 9 minimal essentials class (presumably students who are weak in reading and writing skills). They were doing a nonfiction unit in reading so I proposed we do nonfiction writing as well. I trialled with them a strategy for encouraging students to write about what they know and care about which I proposed to use in a university class. Instead of doing an academic essay a la research paper, I wanted students to select a topic they had some commitment to and work through the writing process to explore it, share it, and finally express themselves on it. These students were given time to consider what they wanted to write about and to discuss their selection with a peer. They then told the teachers what they had chosen eg. Madonna, Beagles, My Dad, Satanism. As a class, we brainstormed a topic: Rocky. They

brainstormed their topics. I made a semantic map and an outline for Rocky. They followed suit. Each step in the process was monitored and shared, with students and teachers providing feedback. By the time first drafts were written, each student felt confident that they knew a lot about their topics: they were experts. Final drafts were done on the computer and the results were astonishingly good. The class felt a real sense of accomplishment and, moreover, a rapport with others in the class. There were still cliques and individual antagonisms, but the class had gelled as a group.

Part III--Today

In one of the courses I teach, I ask students to write me informal letters to give me feedback on the course: what is working for you and what isn't; what could we do differently; what expectations do you have for future classes? Last term we worked through the writing process in preparation for their term paper (we changed its name from 'major paper' to 'minor paper' in order to emphasize the process rather than the product). The students selected a topic, an audience, and a purpose for the paper with the proviso that personal voice should be used (no academic/objective/removed voice). They decided that they would not put their names on the papers, only student numbers, and I in reading them would have to figure out who wrote the paper: a minor mystery related to personal voice. In fact I was intrigued by the way their voices did come through in their writing. In letters to brothers or handouts for parents there was an authenticity to their writing which was new for many. It was not easy for them to break away from the traditional university essay (one woman said at the beginning of the next term when we discussed essays, "Do I have to write it in my own voice? It's so hard!") But this is a story which hasn't yet ended. Perhaps that is one reason for storying in teaching and learning: the stories from the past--whether distant or recent--influence the story of the present and probably the future.

I would like to return to George Clutesi and the talking stick. His ability to inspire by example cannot be fully described as the myths he told of cannot be fully explicated outside the Native tradition. The stories he told were not mythic for him but real. Similarly the stories I have told here have taken on a mythic quality in spite of their basis in fact. My purpose in writing was to draw together some of the stories I tell in order to look at the threads which run through them. I

hope that some of them have provided a sense of recognition or have struck some chord in your experience. For the time being, I relinquish the talking stick to you and encourage you to tell your stories. Through stories do we teach and learn.